

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
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AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 00766

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: THE UNION OF THE LEFT -- NOT MUCH LEFT

SUMMARY: THE UNION OF THE LEFT DISAPPEARED (AT LEAST TEMPORARILY) DURING THE WEEKEND OF JANUARY 7-8 WHEN THE COMMUNIST (PCF) NATIONAL CONFERENCE AGREED UNANIMOUSLY THAT FUTURE COOPERATION WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) WOULD DEPEND PRIMARILY ON THE BALANCE OF ELECTORAL FORCES RESULTING FROM THE FIRST ROUND OF THE ELECTIONS MARCH 12. PCF LEADER GEORGES MARCHAIS DESCRIBED THE PARTY'S CURRENT LEVEL OF 21 PERCENT (ACCORDING TO POLLS) AS "INSUFFICIENT" WHILE CALLING THE 25 PERCENT GOAL SET BY THE 22ND CONGRESS A "GOOD OBJECTIVE". ALTHOUGH THERE IS PROBABLY NOT A SIMPLE
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"MAGIC NUMBER" IN PCF CALCULATIONS, THERE IS CLEARLY AN IMPORTANT BALANCE OF FORCE CONSIDERATION WHICH WILL TAKE PRIORITY IN DETERMINING THE DEGREE OF PCF CO-OPERATION WITH ITS LEFT PARTNERS. BELOW A CERTAIN THRESHOLD OF INFLUENCE, MARCHAIS HAS AT LEAST IMPLIED THAT ONE REAL OPTION FOR PCF CANDIDATES IS REFUSAL TO STEP DOWN IN FAVOR OF BETTER-PLACED SOCIALISTS.

MARCHAIS LIKewise SEEMED TO CHARACTERIZE COMMUNIST STRATEGY AS AN ALL-OR-NOTHING PROPOSITION: EITHER THE ELECTORAL BALANCE IS REEQUILIBRATED IN THE PCF'S FAVOR, AT WHICH POINT THERE WILL BE COMMUNIST MINISTERS, OR THERE WILL BE NO PCF SUPPORT FOR THE PS EITHER DURING OR AFTER THE ELECTIONS. GRANTED THAT THE LATTER POSITION WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO ENFORCE OR JUSTIFY AND THAT OTHER COMPROMISE SOLUTIONS ARE ALWAYS POSSIBLE, MARCHAIS HAS NONETHELESS LEFT OPEN A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY OF NON-COOPERATION AFTER MARCH 12. END SUMMARY.

1. POWER POLITICS PREVAIL: IN A TYPICAL DISPLAY OF UNANIMITY WHICH ONCE AGAIN LAID TO REST RUMORS OF EMERGING PARTY FACTIONS, THE PCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN PARIS JANUARY 7-8 LAUNCHED AN ELECTORAL APPEAL FOR MAXIMUM SUPPORT ON MARCH 12, IMPLICITLY CASTING ASIDE ANY RESIDUAL HOPES THAT THE UNION OF THE LEFT MIGHT BE REVIVED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. OPENING THE CONFERENCE JANUARY 7, PARTY LEADER MARCHAIS LEFT NO DOUBT AS TO COMMUNIST MOTIVATION -- TO REEQUILIBRATE THE ELECTORAL BALANCE ON THE LEFT. IN ARGUING THAT "REAL CHANGE" CANNOT OCCUR UNLESS THE "WORKERS' PARTY" HAS A CERTAIN MINIMUM INFLUENCE, HE CONFIRMED FOR THE FIRST TIME PUBLICLY THAT BALANCE OF FORCE CONSIDERATIONS ARE AT THE HEART OF LEFT DISUNION. MARCHAIS
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WENT EVEN FURTHER IN DEFINING THE ROUGH PARAMETERS OF "ACCEPTABLE" INFLUENCE, CALLING THE 21 PERCENT SHOWN IN CURRENT POLLS "INSUFFICIENT" AND CHARACTERIZING 25 PERCENT AS A GOOD TARGET.

2. THE COMMON PROGRAM FADES AWAY: ALTHOUGH THE PCF ALMOST CERTAINLY CONSIDERS 25 PERCENT AN UNREACHABLE GOAL, THERE IS NO WAY OF EVEN GUESSING AT WHAT THE MAGIC PERCENTAGE MIGHT BE. IN TALKING COLD-BLOODED POWER POLITICS, HOWEVER, MARCHAIS EFFECTIVELY BURIED THE LAST HOPES OF THOSE REMAINING IDEALISTS WHO THOUGHT THAT PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT ON THE MINIMUM WAGE, NUMBER OF NATIONALIZATIONS, ETC., COULD STILL RESCUE THE UNION OF THE LEFT. SOCIALIST LEADER MITTERRAND, WHO HAD JUST MADE A GESTURE TO THE COMMUNISTS IN ACCEPTING THE MINIMUM WAGE AT 2400 FRANCS, HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE COMMUNISTS TO TASK FOR PUTTING THEIR OWN INTERESTS AHEAD OF THOSE OF A LEFT VICTORY, NOTING THAT THE PS WAS IN A MINORITY POSITION WHEN IT AGREED TO THE COMMON PROGRAM IN 1972. THE SOCIALISTS FEEL THAT THERE ARE ELECTORAL POINTS TO BE MADE NOW THAT COMMUNIST CLAIMS OF A PS "VEER TO THE RIGHT" APPEAR

AS SIMPLY CAMOUFLAGE FOR THE TRUE BALANCE OF FORCE
ISSUE.

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3. PCF STRATEGY: EVEN THOUGH QUANTITATIVE FIGURES
HAVE NOW ENTERED THE POLITICAL EQUATION FOR MARCH,
COMMUNIST STRATEGY IS REALLY NOT MUCH BETTER DEFINED
TODAY THAN IT WAS BEFORE THE CONFERENCE. ALTHOUGH
MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR
THE PCF NOT TO STAND DOWN WHERE NECESSARY ON THE
SECOND ROUND, REGARDLESS OF PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE,
THE COMMUNISTS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THERE ARE
INDEED IMPORTANT BALANCE OF FORCE
REQUIREMENTS WHICH, IF NOT MET, COULD AFFECT THEIR
ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR, ALL IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING
"WORKING CLASS INTERESTS". IT REMAINS CONCEIVABLE,
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ALBEIT IMPROBABLE, THAT THE PCF COULD STILL LEAD THE LEFT DOWN THE ROAD OF ELECTORAL SUICIDE. MORE LIKELY, THE PARTY MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO WAFFLE ITS POSITION, RHETORICALLY DEFENDING LEFT SOLIDARITY WHILE IN PRACTICE SABOTAGING ENOUGH PS CANDIDATES TO REDUCE SOCIALIST INFLUENCE AND PROBABLY TO LOSE THE ELECTION. MARCHAIS MAY SIMPLY BE USING 21 PERCENT AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON TO MOTIVATE HIS TROOPS. AS A THREAT, HOWEVER, IT GAINS LITTLE FOR HIM, BUT AS A PROMISE IT HELPS PREPARE THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THAT MOST UNTHINKABLE OF ACTIONS -- REFUSAL TO STAND DOWN OR TO SUPPORT OTHER LEFT CANDIDATES ON THE SECOND ROUND.

4. THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE: IF THE COMMUNISTS DO SUCCEED IN INCREASING THEIR ELECTORAL SCORE BY SEVERAL PERCENTAGE POINTS, MARCHAIS WILL BE CONSIDERED TO HAVE WON HIS GAMBLE AND THE PARTY WILL BE IN A MUCH STRONGER NEGOTIATING POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE SOCIALISTS, BOTH BETWEEN THE TWO ROUNDS OF THE ELECTION AND IN CASE OF A LEFT VICTORY. IF THE MAGIC THRESHOLD IS NOT CROSSED, MARCHAIS MAY HAVE BEGUN LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR ANOTHER "UNTHINKABLE" PCF POSITION, I.E., REFUSAL TO SUPPORT A HOMOGENEOUS SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT IN THE EVENT OF A LEFT MAJORITY. CLOSING HIS NEARLY TWO-HOUR PRESENTATION, HE LEFT THE DELEGATES WITH THESE WORDS: "CHANGE REQUIRES THE PRESENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS....IT REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNIST MINISTERS IN THE GOVERNMENT." IF MARCHAIS' INTENT IS TO RULE OUT A SOLUTION ON THE ITALIAN OR PORTUGUESE MODEL, HE HAS ONCE AGAIN CONFOUNDED THOSE EXPERTS WHO MAINTAINED THAT THE PCF "WOULD HAVE TO" SUPPORT A LEFT MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT, EVEN IF IT REFUSED TO

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ENTER THE GOVERNMENT. TAKING THE 21 PERCENT BARRIER ALONG WITH THIS LAST PRONOUNCEMENT, MARCHAIS HAS COME CLOSE TO PROSCRIBING AN ALL-OR-NOTHING SOLUTION:

-- EITHER THE PCF SHOWS THE NECESSARY STRENGTH ON MARCH 12, LEADING TO LEFT COOPERATION ON THE SECOND ROUND AND COMMUNIST MINISTERS IN GOVERNMENT;

-- OR IT DOESN'T, MEANING NO OR MINIMAL HELP FOR THE SOCIALISTS DURING THE ELECTION AND NO OR MINIMAL

SUPPORT SHOULD A LEFT MAJORITY STILL MANAGE TO EMERGE.

THERE REMAINS ENOUGH AMBIGUITY TO KEEP EVERYONE ON
EDGE UNTIL MARCH 12, BUT IT IS NOW TOTALLY CLEAR THAT
THE PCF TAKES ITS BALANCE OF FORCE PROBLEM QUITE
SERIOUSLY.
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